

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03366 141420Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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P R 141155Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4564
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USCINCEUR VAHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3366

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR PDEV LE IS
SUBJ: BECHIR GEMAYEL ON SOUTH LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: LEBANESE FRONT MILITIA COMMANDER BECHIR GEMAYEL PERCEIVES SOUTH LEBANON PROBLEM STRICTLY IN TERMS OF SAFE-GUARDING INTERESTS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE AREA, FROM BOTH ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS. DILEMMA, IN HIS VIEW, IS HOW TO ESTABLISH PHYSICAL COMMUNICATION LINK BETWEEN CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH AND CHRISTIANS IN CENTRAL LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF CALLED ON BECHIR GEMAYEL AT PHALANGE PARTY HEAD-QUARTERS IN ASHRAFIYAH JULY 12. PART OF DISCUSSION DEALT WITH SOUTH LEBANON.

3. NO CONTROL OF CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH. BECHIR SAID HE HAD VIRTUALLY NO CONTROL OF CHRISTIAN LEBANESE FORCES IN SOUTH. HE SAID RECENT ATTACK ON YARIN WAS UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT HIS
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03366 141420Z

AUTHORIZATION BY LOCAL CHRISTIANS LED BY CAPTAIN SAMI CHIDIAC. (COMMENT: THIS IS AT VARIANCE WITH OTHER REPORTS, THAT BECHIR GAVE FINANCIAL AND MANPOWER SUPPORT TO FORCES IN SOUTH AND ENCOURAGED THEM TO UNDERTAKE AN OFFENSIVE OPERATION, SHORTLY BEFORE ATTACK ON YARIN.) ASKED WHO DOES CONTROL THEM, BECHIR RESPONDED THAT ISRAELIS HAD CONSIDERABLE VETO POWER, BUT THAT THE LOCAL COMMANDERS, INCLUDING MAJOR HADDAD, WERE LARGELY ON

THEIR OWN. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID, IN HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH PLO EMISSARY HANI HASSAN, HE MAINTAINS PRETENSE THAT FORCES ARE UNDER HIS CONTROL, FOR THE SAKE OF APPEARANCES.

4. ISRAELI ROLE. BECHIR DESCRIBED CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH AS CAUGHT BETWEEN "TWO ENEMIES," PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS. HOWEVER, WHEN EMBOFF TOLD HIM THAT ISRAELIS HAD GIVEN ASSURANCES TO U.S. THAT THEY WOULD NOT INVADE OR OCCUPY SOUTH LEBANON, HE SEEMED TO IMPLY A HOPE THAT SUCH AN EVENTUALITY WOULD OFFER A WAY OUT OF THE DILEMMA.

5. SEARCH FOR PHYSICAL COMMUNICATION. BECHIR SPECULATED ON IDEA THAT CHRISTIANS COULD GAIN CONTROL OF FISHING PORT OF NAQURAH. THIS WOULD ALLOW HIM TO SEND PERHAPS 400 PHALANGISTS TO THE AREA, NOT, HE SAID, FOR OFFENSIVE PURPOSES, BUT TO LOOK AFTER THE MEDICAL AND OTHER PHYSICAL NEEDS OF THE LOCAL CHRISTIAN INHABITANTS. THEY WOULD ALSO BE ABLE TO CONSOLIDATE AND SECURE THE CHRISTIAN VILLAGES. EMBOFF POINTED OUT THAT THIS WOULD CONSTITUTE AN OFFENSIVE OPERATION. BECHIR SAID THAT HE COULD NOT IMAGINE ANY OTHER SOLUTION, SINCE A LAND LINK WOULD INVOLVE PASSING THROUGH NUMEROUS PALESTINIAN AND SYRIAN CHECKPOINTS.

6. NO CONFIDENCE IN THE LEBANESE ARMY. BECHIR ASKED WHAT WAS THE U.S. VIEW OF A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM. EMBOFF SAID THAT THERE SEEMED TO BE NO IMMEDIATE SOLUTION OTHER THAN A CEASE-CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03366 141420Z

FIRE, A MODUS-VIVENDI. IN THE LONGER RUN, THE REESTABLISHED LEBANESE ARMY MIGHT BE ABLE TO ENTER THE AREA; ULTIMATELY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PALESTINIAN "HOMELAND" WOULD DEPRIVE THE PALESTINIANS OF A PRETEXT TO MAINTAIN AN ARMED PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON. BECHIR WAS COMPLETELY SKEPTICAL, EVEN HOSTILE, TO THE IDEA OF THE LEBANESE ARMY PLAYING A ROLE IN SOUTH LEBANON OR, FOR THAT MATTER, ANYWHERE ELSE IN LEBANON. HE FELT VERY STRONGLY THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY OF THE FUTURE WOULD BE NO MORE ABLE TO DEFEND THE VITAL INTERESTS OF LEBANESE CHRISTIANS THAN THE LEBANESE ARMY OF THE PAST. IN ANY CASE, THE ARMY COULD NOT BE IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE EVEN IN THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT THE PROBLEM WAS IMMEDIATE.

7. COMMENT: BECHIR'S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF SOUTH LEBANON, LIKE HIS APPROACH TO EVERYTHING, IS VISCERAL AND ETHNIC. THE ROLE HE HAS CUT OUT FOR HIMSELF IS AS DEFENDER OF "HIS" PEOPLE, NOT THAT OF A POLITICIAN TRYING TO FIND VIABLE SOLUTIONS TO DIFFICULT PROBLEMS.

8. IN THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATION, BECHIR SEEMED TO REFLECT A LESS HOSTILE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SYRIANS THAN IN THE PAST, AND A MORE REALISTIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ISRAELIS. HE ALSO

SEEMED TO HAVE A MORE REALISTIC PERCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN
ABILITY TO LIBERATE THE SOUTH FROM THE PALESTINIANS BY FORCE
OF ARMS. AT THE SAME TIME, HE MANIFESTED CONTINUING
UNRELENTING HOSTILITY TOWARDS THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT.
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